

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BEIRUT 07643 232019Z

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W

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O 232004Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 1864

INFO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS NIACT IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 7643

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, CY, LE, US, ASEC

SUBJECT: TERRORISM: LEBANESE GROUP DEMANDS FOR HOSTAGE RELEASE

REF: (A) NICOSIA 2946, (B) DEPARTMENT TELEXCON ITEM 16

1. OUR REACTION ON RECEIVING REFTEL A WAS THAT IT WAS A HOAX, PERPETRATED BY SOMEONE WHO IS MENTALLY ILL, FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

A. WE WERE AND ARE UNAWARE OF ANY AMERICANS MISSING IN LEBANON OR ELSEWHERE AND COULD NOT BELIEVE THAT 29 AMCITS AND 18 CITIZENS OF WESTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES COULD HAVE BEEN KIDNAPED HERE OR ELSEWHERE AND BE HELD HOSTAGE IN LEFTIST-CONTROLLED LEBANON WITHOUT THIS INFORMATION BECOMING KNOWN TO US. WE HAVE NOT, OF COURSE, CHECKED WHEREABOUTS OF EVERY AMERICAN CITIZEN STILL IN LEBANON, BUT ALLEGED NUMBERS OF HOSTAGES INVOLVED SEEM TO US TO MAKE THIS STORY INCREDIBLE.

B. RANSOM DEMANDED IS AN UNUSUAL AMOUNT WHICH SEEMS TO HAVE NO RELATION TO NUMBER OF HOSTAGES OR ANY RATIONAL EXPLANATION.

C. ASSERTION THAT HOSTAGES ARE BEING HELD IN THREE DIFFERENT PLACES IN LEFTIST-HELD TERRITORY IN LEBANON WHILE CONTACT WITH "JANE" AND PRESUMABLY MONEY TRANSFER

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BEIRUT 07643 232019Z

IS TO TAKE PLACE IN EAST BEIRUT IMPLIES AN OPERATIONAL

CAPABILITY WHICH IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE IN LEBANON TODAY. EVEN A MAJOR EXTREMIST CHRISTIAN, MUSLIM OR FEDAYEEN GROUP (WHICH WE DO NOT BELIEVE THIS IS) WOULD BE STRETCHED TO THE LIMIT FOR OPERATIONAL ASSETS TO CARRY OUT SUCH AN OPERATION.

D. ALTHOUGH LETTER SAYS DEMAND IS TO BE RESPONDED TO WITHIN 48 HOURS OF ITS DELIVERY AT EMBASSY NICOSIA, SENDER COULD NOT KNOW WITH ANY DEGREE OF PRECISION EXACT TIME LETTER RECEIVED. IF DEMAND WERE SERIOUS, PERPETRATOR WOULD PRESUMABLY HAVE SET A PRECISE DATE (SEE PARA 4 BELOW).

2. IF THERE IS A POLITICAL INTENT IN THIS LETTER, IT MAY BE TO DAMAGE THE CHRISTIAN CAUSE. USE OF FRENCH TENDS TO INDICATE CHRISTIAN AUTHORSHIP AND JOUNIEH RETURN ADDRESS ON ENVELOPE, NEWSPAPERS TO BE USED, AND LOCATION OF JANE'S TELEPHONE CONTACT ARE ALL ASSOCIATED WITH CHRISTIAN-HELD LEBANON. ALLEGED PLACE OF DETENTION OF HOSTAGES, HOWEVER, IS OUTSIDE OF CHRISTIAN-CONTROLLED TERRITORY, THUS PREVENTING INVESTIGATION BY CHRISTIAN AUTHORITIES.

3. FOR REASONS OUTLINED ABOVE WE ARE STILL INCLINED TO BELIEVE LETTER IS A MACABRE HOAX. HOWEVER, WE DID NOT RECOGNIZE SIGNIFICANCE OF MILFENHALL AND STROMFJORD AND DEPARTMENT MAY HAVE INFORMATION NOT AVAILABLE TO US.

4. WE HAVE JUST COME ACROSS ADVERTISEMENT FOR HAWANA TRAVEL AND TOURISM (EX-EAGLE) IN SEP 14 L'ORIENT-LE JOUR. HAWANA OFFERS FULL RANGE OF TRAVEL AGENCY SERVICES INCLUDING "DAILY POSTAL COURIER, TELEX AND TELEGRAPH SERVICE." ADDRESS IS JOUNIEH, PLACE CENTRALE, IMM. CHIHA, TEL 930845-934692; BYBLOS - RUE MAR YOUDHANNA - IMM AKRA. HAWANA'S SLOGAN IS "TOUJOURS EN AVANT" (ALWAYS AHEAD). HAWANA IS APPARENTLY ONE OF THE MANY TRAVEL AGENCIES FACILITATING COMMUNICATIONS AND TRANSPORTATION BETWEEN CYPRUS AND CHRISTIAN-HELD LEBANON.

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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 07643 232019Z

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Message Attributes

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Margaret P. Grafeld
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04 MAY 2006

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